

PART 51.

Third
Series

MARCH,
1893.

VOL
9

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM
YEAR TO YEAR.

All the Year Round

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

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"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

NO. 218.—THIRD SERIES.

SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 1893.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

BY MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "Cross Currents," "A Mist of Error," "Her Inheritance," "A Social Success," "Kitty's Victim," "An Outstanding Debt," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XII.

THE season, as Mrs. Romaine had told Dennis Falconer, was to be a short one, and its proceedings were apparently to be regulated on the old principle of a short life and a merry one. Gaieties overtook one another in too rapid succession, and an unusually sunny and breezy May and June, with the inevitable action of such weather on human beings, even under the most artificial conditions, rendered these gaieties a shade more really gay than usual.

The atmosphere was not, again, so close as it had been on the afternoon when Dennis Falconer called on Mrs. Romaine, and it is presumable that the weather must have been responsible for her general unusualness of mood on the evening of that day; for if she was not quite herself on the following morning, the touch of self-compulsion in her brightness was so slight as to be hardly perceptible, and a day or two later it had entirely disappeared. Her artificial vivacity, always with its undercurrent of genuine content, reasserted itself, as though it had never been disturbed.

Certainly if constant stir and movement are conducive to good spirits, there was nothing wonderful in Mrs. Romaine's satisfaction with life. For she had not, as she complained laughingly, a single moment to herself.

"It's a regular treadmill!" she exclaimed gaily one day to Lord Garstin.

"I had really forgotten what a terrible thing a London season was!"

"It seems to agree with you," was the answer. "There is one lady of my acquaintance, and only one, who seems to grow younger every day!"

"You can't mean me," she laughed. "I assure you, I am growing grey with incessantly running after that boy of mine! He is as difficult to catch as any lion of the season. I never see him except at parties."

Julian's intimacy with Marston Loring had grown apace, and it had led to sundry social consequences which were, his mother said, "so good for him." Little dinners at the club, to which he had been duly elected; dinners at which he was now guest, now host; jovial little bachelor suppers made up among the very best "sets." Loring himself was very careful—though he knew better than to make his care perceptible, except in its results—never to allow himself to be placed in the position of a rival to Mrs. Romaine for her son's time and company. He lost no opportunity of making himself useful and agreeable to Mrs. Romaine; now using pleasantly arrogated rights as Julian's friend; now his superior brain-power and knowledge of the world; until he gradually assumed the position of friend of the house. But club life necessarily created in Julian's world interests apart from his mother—interests which she was apparently well content that he should have, so long as his ever-ready chatter to her on the subject revealed that they were all connected with good "sets."

It was furthermore a season of very pretty debutantes, a large majority of whom elected to look upon Mr. Romaine as "such a nice boy," and to exact—or

permit—any amount of slavery from him in the matters of fetching and carrying and general attendance. "You're known to be so profoundly ineligible, you see!" his mother would say to him, laughing. "Nobody is in the least afraid of you, poor boy!" And she looked on with perfect calmness as he danced, and rode, and did church parade; looked on with a calmness which might have been mistaken for indifference, but for the significant fact that she always knew which of his "jolly girls" was in the ascendant for the moment.

Mrs. Newton had gone home on the day following the meeting at the theatre.

Falconer was to be seen about throughout the season, making his grave concession to the weaknesses of society. Mrs. Romayne and Julian met him constantly, and he was asked to, and attended, the most formal of the dinners given at Queen Anne Street. But the intercourse between him and his "connection," as Mrs. Romayne called herself, was of the most distant and non-progressive type. Julian did not take to him at all. "He is such a solemn fellow, mother!" he said. "He seems to think that I'm doing something wrong all the time." An observation to which Mrs. Romayne replied by laughing a rather forced laugh and changing the conversation.

The last event of the season, as it became evident as the weeks ran out, would be the bazaar in aid of Mrs. Halse's discovery among charities. It was, perhaps, as well that the institution in question was by no means in such urgent need of patronage as might have been argued from Mrs. Halse's demeanour towards it earlier in the proceedings; for that lady's enthusiasm on the subject had suffered severely in the contest with the numerous other enthusiasms which had succeeded it, and the affairs of the bazaar had been pursued by all its supporters with energy which is most charitably to be described as intermittent. Three separate dates had been fixed for the opening day; and, after a great deal of money had been spent in printing and advertising, each of these in succession had had to be abandoned owing to the singular incompleteness of every fundamental arrangement—though, as Mrs. Halse observed impatiently, after the third postponement, there were "heaps and heaps of Chinese lanterns." Finally it was announced for the fifth and sixth

of July; and owing to herculean efforts on the part of half-a-dozen unfortunate men enlisted in the cause, who apparently braced themselves to the task with a desperate sense that if the affair was not somehow or another carried through now, by fair means or foul, they were doomed to struggle in a tumultuous sea of fashionable feminine futility for the remainder of their miserable lives, on the fifth the bazaar was actually opened.

It was late in the evening of that eventful day, and in various fashionable drawing-rooms exhausted ladies stretched on sofas were recruiting their forces after their severe labours. It had been the fashion for the last week or more among the prospective stall-holders to allude to the fatigue before them with resigned and heroic sighs of awful import; consequently they were now convinced to a woman that they were in the last stages of exhaustion. As a matter of fact it is doubtful whether out of the sensations of all the "smart" helpers concerned—with the exception of the devoted half-dozen before mentioned, who had retired to various clubs in a state of collapse—a decent state of fatigue could have been constructed; and the reason for this was threefold. In the first place, so much money had been spent in announcing the dates when the bazaar did not take place, that there was exceedingly little forthcoming to announce the date when it did take place; consequently its attractive existence remained almost unknown to the general public, and the services of the sellers were in very slight demand. In the second place, the greater part of the work which could not be done by proxy was left undone. And in the third place, each lady had been throughout the day so deeply convinced of the "frightfully tiring" nature of her occupation, that she thought it only her duty to "save herself" whenever that course was open to her—which was almost always.

In the drawing-room at Chelsea, very cool and pretty with its open windows and its plentiful supply of flowers and ferns, Mrs. Romayne was lying on the sofa, as the exigencies of the moment, socially speaking, demanded of her, in an attitude of graceful weariness; an attitude which was rather belied by the alert expression of her contented face. She had dined at home—"just a quiet little dinner, you know—cold, because goodness knows when we shall get it!"—with

Julian and Loring at half-past seven. The bazaar did not close until nine, but all the principal stall-holders had thought it their duty to the following day not to wear themselves quite out, and had left the last two hours to the care of one or other of the hangers-on, of whom "smart" women may usually have a supply if they choose; and Mrs. Romayne's quiet little dinner was only one of a score of similar functions, very dainty and luxurious in view of the tremendous exertions which had preceded them, which were being held in various fashionable parts of London. At ten o'clock Loring had taken his leave, declaring sympathetically that Mrs. Romayne must long for perfect quiet after her exertions. It was then that Mrs. Romayne had betaken herself to her sofa and her papers.

"What an immense time it is since we have had such a domesticated hour!"

Mrs. Romayne had laid down her literature some moments before, and had been lying looking at Julian with that curious expression in her eyes which would creep into them now and again when they rested on the good-looking young figure, and which harmonised so ill with the shallow, vivacious prettiness of the rest of her face. She spoke, however, with her usual light laugh at herself, and Julian laughed too as he threw down his magazine and turned towards her.

"It is an age, isn't it?" he said.

During the final agony of preparation for the bazaar, Julian had been in immense request. Not that he was one of the devoted half-dozen, or that he did much definite work; but he was always ready to discuss any lady's private fad with her for any length of time, and to rush all over London about nothing. His exertions, and the exhaustion engendered thereby, had rendered necessary a great deal of recreation at the club. He had repaired thither very frequently of late, instead of escorting his mother home on the conclusion of their tale of parties for the night.

"It is a comfort to think that it is so nearly over!" observed Mrs. Romayne carelessly. It is never worth while, in the world in which Mrs. Romayne moved, to express more than half your meaning in words, and Julian quite understood that she alluded, not to the domestic hour, but to the season. Her words were not prompted by any actual weariness of the round of life she characterised as "it," but the sentiment was in the air—the fashion-

able air, that is to say. She and Julian, in common with the greater part of their world, were leaving London at the end of the week.

"It has been awfully jolly!" said Julian, leaning back in his chair and resting his head against his loosely locked hands. "I had no idea life was such a first-rate business!"

His mother smiled, and there was a strange touch of triumph in her smile.

"It is a first-rate business," she assented, "if one lives it among the right people and in the right position. I imagine you see by this time that it isn't much use otherwise!"

He laughed as though his appreciation of her words rendered them almost a truism to him, and there was a moment's silence. It was broken by Julian.

"It costs a lot of money," he said, in a casual, indefinite way, but with a quick glance at his mother.

"Well, it isn't cheap, certainly," was the laughing answer; "but I think we shall manage." Then noticing something a little deprecating about his pose and expression, Mrs. Romayne added, with mock reprehension, "You're not going to ask me to raise your allowance, you extravagant boy?"

Julian moved, and leaning forward, clasped his hands round one knee as if the uncomfortable and transitory pose assisted explanation. He laughed back at her, but he was looking nevertheless somewhat ashamed of himself.

"No, it's not that—exactly," he began rather lamely. "It's a splendid allowance, mother dear, and I'm no end grateful; but the fact is, there has been a good deal of card-playing lately at the club. I don't care for cards, you know, but one must play a bit, and I have been rather a fool. Look here, dear, I suppose—I suppose you couldn't let me have two hundred, could you—before we go away, you know?"

"Two hundred, Julian! My dear boy!"

There was a strong tone of surprise and remonstrance in Mrs. Romayne's voice, and there was also a very distinct note of annoyance; but all these sentiments seemed rather to apply to the demand, which was apparently unseasonable, than to the desirability of the transaction. She was neither startled nor distressed.

"It is young Fordyce, mother," continued her son deprecatingly. "It was awfully foolish to play with him, he's so

bestly lucky. And you see I must settle it before I go away."

"And have you none of your own?" demanded his mother, with some asperity in her tone. Julian's creditor was a young man who had the reputation of being a "very good sort of fellow," who would never "do" in society.

"I'm awfully sorry to say I haven't!" returned Julian meekly.

There was a moment's pause, and Mrs. Romayne tapped impatiently on the papers lying by her.

"It is such an inconvenient moment," she said at last. "I have just made all my arrangements for the quarter—I don't mean that you can't have it, of course you can, dear—but it is difficult to lay my hand on it at this moment."

"Falconer could arrange it for you," suggested Julian, alluding to Falconer in his capacity of trustee for the first time, as it happened.

Mrs. Romayne started violently, and a sharp exclamation of dissent rose to her lips. She stopped it half uttered, and paused a moment, controlling herself with difficulty.

"No," she said at last, in rather a hard tone. "I would rather not do that. I will think it over and see what can be done. We must raise your allowance, sir. I can't have mines sprung on me like this!"

She had risen as she spoke, and as he followed her example she lifted her face towards him for the good-night kiss which always passed between them.

"I will sleep upon it," she said. "Good night, extravagant boy."

EXPLOSIVES.

In nothing is the progress of modern science more strongly marked than in the way of discovering destructive forces. When it is an affair of ameliorating the conditions of life or alleviating the sufferings of humanity, we take it as Dibdin's tars took the summons to prayers, and like them we "tip the leisure jog"; while, like the same seamen piped to grog, we rush with the avidity of wolves or bears upon the invention of new agents of destruction. Half a century ago we were still in the bloom of innocency as regards explosives. We had hardly got beyond the "invention of gunpowder" stage in destructiveness, and many people thought even then that

we had gone a great deal too far, and that Hotspur's friend was quite in the right,

And that it was great pity, so it was,
This villainous saltpetre should be digg'd
Out of the bowels of the harmless earth,
Which many a good tall fellow hath destroyed
So cowardly.

Among the many curious suggestions for the better carrying on of the war in the Crimea was that of a newspaper correspondent, who advised the formation of a corps of archers, whose arrows would, he plausibly argued, be far more deadly than the erratic bullets of "Brown Bess," the smooth-barrelled musket with which the greater part of our troops were armed.

But the cycle of murderous wars which succeeded the forty years' peace has so stimulated the efforts of inventors that all kinds of new explosives are in the field, while rumour ever and again hints at the discovery of some fresh compound, which is to deal destructiveness on a scale hitherto undreamt of. There is something strangely attractive, too, in the study of explosives. Give a boy a cabinet of chemicals, and his first experiments, if left to himself, will be in the direction of a good blow-up of some kind. He will study the nitrates and the chlorates, his great ambition will be to make a fulminating powder that will explode at a touch, and it will not be his fault if he fails to blow up himself, his laboratory, and perhaps some portion of the paternal mansion.

The old alchemists, too, in their search for the universal element, came into the track of powerful explosives, and often suffered from their effects. Their discovery of "aqua fortis," which they used as a solvent, was in effect a revelation of the source of modern explosives, and the sudden departure of one of the adepts of the ancient mysteries in a flash of flame and cloud of smoke, such as tradition does not fail to record, may be accounted for by some trifling indiscretion in handling such a powerful element, without invoking any supernatural machinery.

In the course of their experiments it is probable that the alchemists arrived at the knowledge of sundry powerful explosive compositions, such as are shadowed forth in the treatises of the famous Roger Bacon, whose descriptions, even allowing for natural "brag," seem to indicate an explosive technically of a higher nature than gunpowder. The explosive character of that villainous saltpetre, when combined with charcoal, was probably first discovered by accident and turned to account

by practical military engineers, who naturally preserved in profound secrecy the processes of its manufacture. A difficulty in the way of the extensive use of gunpowder was the scanty supply of saltpetre, few natural deposits of which were then known. In England the saltpetre men enjoyed many powers and immunities. They were authorised to search and dig for saltpetre on anybody's premises, and especially to dig up the floors of stables, cattle-sheds, and such like premises, which then were rarely either paved or drained.

The use of powder for artillery long preceded its adoption for exploding mines in sieges. The first instance of the latter use is in 1487, when the results of the explosion were so trifling that there is no other instance of the practice till 1503, when the Spaniards employed gunpowder to blow up a fort held by the French in Naples. Thus Shakespeare perpetrates a trifling anachronism when he brings in Fluellen at the siege of Harfleur, complaining: "For look you, the mines is not according to the discipline of the war. I think a' will blow up all if there is not better directions"; while his friend the Scotch Captain is equally in advance of the times when he cries: "I would have blowed up the town, so Christ save me la, in an hour." But Shakespeare's evidence is conclusive on the point that, when he wrote, the use of explosives in military engineering was sufficiently well understood. The same period, too, had witnessed the successful use of gunpowder in a blow-up of a private character.

At two o'clock one winter's morning, the ninth of February, 1567, a loud explosion shook the narrow closes and wynds of old Edinburgh, and alarmed the whole city. Daylight showed that the solitary house called Kirk of Field had been blown up by gunpowder, and the body of the King Consort, with that of his servant, was found lying in an adjacent garden. The son of this same Darnley, it will be remembered, our James the First, had a rather narrow escape of a similar fate, in the detection of the famous Gunpowder Plot of 1605.

Indeed, as long as gunpowder continued to be the only available explosive, criminal conspiracies for its use rarely attained even the negative success of a blow-up. The latest instance of its employment, however, is of considerable interest. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the

thirteenth of December, 1867, that some unknown man drove a wheelbarrow containing a barrel of gunpowder up to the great dead wall enclosing the House of Detention at Clerkenwell. He lighted a fuse and calmly left it burning. Presently half London was alarmed by the shock of the explosion. Six persons were killed, a hundred and twenty wounded, and many in delicate health were endangered by the shock and terror. A plot more primitive and simple in its savagery was perhaps never hatched, for if the design was to aid in the escape of certain prisoners confined within the jail, they were the most likely to be killed or wounded by the explosion, which destroyed part of the wall of their exercise ground.

The era of dynamite was yet to come, for that substance was still something of a novelty, and the mode of its employment not generally understood. To the average mind it might seem that chemists were ill employed in inventing such dangerous mixtures, but science is great and must prevail. The first step towards dynamite was the chemical treatment of fats which resulted in the well-known product glycerine. A little later—in 1846—a chemist discovered that by treating glycerine with nitric acid a highly explosive substance resulted, little differing in appearance, which became known as nitro-glycerine.

The new product was, without doubt, of high explosive power, but was rendered useless for practical purposes by its instability and uncertainty. Not only was it a source of constant danger to its possessor from its habits of spontaneous explosion, but it was often extremely difficult to make it go off when it was wanted to. To apply a lighted coal to it would perhaps only result in extinguishing the coal, while at another time the rumbling of a loaded waggon might cause a violent explosion. The Swedish chemist Nobel, however, discovered that it might be detonated with fulminate of mercury, not only with certainty, but with higher explosive results; and as a careful process of manufacture and certain chemical precautions greatly diminished its dangerous sensitiveness, Nobel began to make nitro-glycerine, as a useful explosive, for mining and engineering works generally. But from a very natural distrust of the deadly jelly, no carrier by road or rail, by steam or sail, by river or sea, would undertake its conveyance, and Nobel had almost

abandoned the manufacture when an accident showed him a way through his difficulties.

Sundry pots of jelly were being forwarded to some public works by Nobel's own cart and horses. To secure the jars from fracture they were carefully packed in sand, but on the way one of the jars broke, and its contents were found to have been completely absorbed by the sand about it. Struck with this result, Nobel conceived the idea that the sand itself, thus charged with nitrate, might be found the ideal explosive. And thus it proved, and to the new substance Nobel gave the name of dynamite, a name henceforth to be of world-wide fame, and for good or ill to make for itself a place in the history of the century.

Dynamite, it must be owned, has in its way done good service for civilisation. The great works of modern engineering would hardly have been possible without the aid of high explosives, of which dynamite is the prototype. Tunnelling, rock cuttings, blastings of all kinds were greatly facilitated by the new explosive, in which power is stored with so much greater compactness than in gunpowder. In mines and quarries all over the world dynamite in some of its forms has practically superseded gunpowder. The industrial demand has brought into the market many modifications of the original type. The earth basis of true dynamite has been replaced by sawdust, sugar, starch, charcoal, and dozens of more or less effective mixtures; in fact, almost any absorbent substance will form a vehicle for nitro-glycerine.

As might be expected, the military administrations of the different European powers kept an eye upon the development of the new explosive. The State laboratories of France, after many years of trials and experiments, have evolved the powerful substance known as *mélinite*, the composition of which is an open secret, while its merits as compared with dynamite consist in the superior stability of its base, which it is claimed will stand the shock and heat of being fired from heavy guns as a charge for shells. The Austrians, too, have a new explosive called *éclatite*, warranted to "écraser" any number of the "enemy." Probably the authorities at Woolwich have something "up their sleeve" of a like nature.

But the successes of our own military chemists have been chiefly in the direction of gun-cotton, of which there is a con-

siderable Government factory at Waltham Abbey. The invention of cotton-powder preceded that of nitro-glycerine, but it was so uncertain in character as to be practically useless, till Professor Abel, the chemical adviser of our War Department, invented and patented a new process of manufacture which has made the substance available as a military explosive, especially as a charge for torpedoes and submarine mines of every description. Many other cellular substances as well as cotton can be charged with nitrates and made to do duty as explosives, and it is in this direction that we must look for the "smokeless powder" which is to be one of the features of the next great war.

It was evident from an early period in the history of these new explosives, that they were destined to become a formidable weapon in the hands of those who, for whatever reason, were at war with society and enemies of existing institutions. But the first serious dynamite explosion was planned for purposes of sordid gain. A person engaged in the foreign trade of Bremerhaven conceived the idea of shipping a number of cases of worthless goods and insuring them for a large amount, while a case of dynamite, concealed within one of the bales, should be detonated by a clockwork arrangement at the end of a certain number of days, and thus send the unfortunate ship with its crew and all it contained to the bottom of the sea. The plan was spoilt by the premature explosion of the case of dynamite on the quay at Bremerhaven, with loss of life and great damage to property. The author of the plot committed suicide on the failure of his scheme. The affair caused much alarm at the time, and led to many precautions being taken in shipping goods from unknown consignees.

The next striking example of the terrible power of the new explosives was the assassination of the Czar, Alexander of Russia, on the thirteenth of March, 1881. The Czar was being driven about one p.m. from the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg, and had reached the Catherine Canal, when an explosion took place just behind the carriage, wounding the horses, and killing one of the Czar's escort. The Emperor alighted from the shattered carriage. "Thank Heaven I am untouched," he replied to those about him. The youth who had thrown the bomb, who carried a revolver and dagger in either hand, was in the grasp of a soldier, and surrounded by

an excited crowd. The danger seemed past when, as the Czar was enquiring into the condition of the wounded, of whom many were stretched helpless around, another young man threw something at his feet which exploded, and left the Czar mangled and bleeding on the ground.

The feeling that a new and terrible power was abroad in the hands of political or social fanatics spread itself throughout Europe, and was intensified, as far as England was concerned, by the catastrophe that befell the "Dottrel," sloop of war, which was blown up off Sandy Point in the Straits of Magellan on the twenty-sixth of April, 1881, only eleven men being saved out of the whole crew. The cause of the explosion has never been fully ascertained, but it is due to the dynamiters, who boasted of the achievement, to state that appearances pointed to an accidental explosion.

In Russia the Nihilists kept up the terror of their name, and even in Germany, where the Emperor William was personally popular, dynamite conspiracies were on foot. The Emperor William had a narrow escape at the opening of the Niederwald Monument in 1883. A drain beneath the road along which he passed was packed with dynamite, but the conspirators failed to ignite it, and the Emperor passed over it in safety.

In the same year, 1883, began what we may call the epidemic of explosions in England. The opening scene was at the Government offices at Whitehall on the night of the fifteenth of March, when an explosion occurred which spread consternation in Westminster, and gave the Houses of Parliament a shaking. The morning light showed a great smash at the corner of the Local Government offices, all the windows smashed, and official dockets peeping out of bare openings in the walls. King Street, the entrance of which is opposite the scene of the explosion, bore a shattered, wrecked appearance, with windows smashed and frames starting out of the surrounding brickwork. Happily no human being was touched, and the same good fortune attended an explosion at "The Times" office on the same night.

In the following month the discovery at Birmingham of a secret manufactory of nitro-glycerine seemed to show the source of the danger, and the arrest of those connected with it gave hopes that the series of explosions would come to an end.

But, although enough nitro-glycerine had been seized to lay all London in ruins, some had probably been saved for future operations. Dynamite, in one or other of its forms, was then so freely distributed that there was no great difficulty in obtaining a supply for any purpose for which it might be wanted.

The next attempt, if it had any definite aim at all, seems to have been intended to overawe the railway companies. For on the night of the twenty-sixth of February, 1884, there was an explosion of dynamite in the cloak-room of the Victoria Station. A number of bags and portmanteaux were torn to bits, but nobody was a penny the worse for the explosion. But the occurrence suggested a general examination of the luggage left at the cloak-rooms of the various railway stations in London, resulting in the discovery of portmanteaux charged with dynamite at Charing Cross, Paddington, and Ludgate stations. In each case a clock had been arranged to detonate the charge at a given time, but in such an ineffective fashion that all the clocks had stopped in transit.

Again, on the thirtieth of May in the same year a charge of dynamite was exploded in the area of the Junior Carlton Club in St. James's Square, and another against Sir Watkin Wynn's house in the same square. Again the result was only broken windows and consternation, which was probably all that the conspirators desired, and the same result attended an almost simultaneous explosion in Scotland Yard—the old establishment—when the "Rising Sun" public-house was wrecked, while the office and officers of police escaped unhurt. At the same time a series of explosions broke out in Canada, and the general public began to feel that things were getting warm. Towards the end of the year London Bridge was attacked. Three conspirators—not muffled in cloaks, but wearing the ordinary garb of industrious citizens, and carrying the inevitable portmanteau—hired a boat on the Surrey side, and in the hazy darkness of five forty-five on a winter's afternoon, rowed to the second arch of London Bridge from the same side of the river. It is the practice of the engineers of the French "Ponts et Chaussées" to leave chambers in the masonry of any new bridges they may build, to facilitate their being blown up on the advance of an enemy. Probably this idea had not occurred to the builders of London Bridge; but, anyhow, below high-

water mark there are recesses in the masonry which seem just adapted for the purpose. The dynamiters had been accurately informed as to this, but their information was hardly up to date, as recently the recesses had been covered with iron gratings as a matter of precaution. So that all that the conspirators could effect was to hang up their bag of dynamite under the arch and row away. It is said that the explosion not coming off as quickly as they expected, the conspirators rowed back with the intention of affixing a fresh fuse, when the dynamite exploded and seriously, if not mortally, injured one of the party. But, as the gentlemen in the boat have not yet published their memoirs, it is not possible to speak with certainty as to the details of the exploit. Anyhow, London was let off again with a big noise and a big fright.

The explosions that followed within a few short weeks were far more serious. The fine crypt beneath St. Stephen's Chapel, the site of the Chapel being now the corridor leading from Westminster Hall to the central lobbies of the Houses of Parliament, was the scene of the next attempt. The twenty-fourth of January, 1885, was Saturday, on which day the public is admitted to see the splendours of Parliament House. One of the public carried a black bag, which he deposited on the floor of the crypt—recently restored and also open to the public. A lady saw the bag with smoke issuing from it. Constable Cole bravely seized it, carried it into the hall at the imminent risk of destruction, and threw it from him to the floor of the hall, where it exploded, wounding the brave constable and damaging the hall, but occasioning no further casualties. At the same time another charge of dynamite exploded in the House of Commons itself, again happily with no fatal results. On the same day the Tower of London was open free to the public, and also to the dynamiter who left his bag in the middle story of the White Tower and ran away. Another explosion, with minor casualties and major panic, followed. As other public buildings, the Post Office, the British Museum, the Inland Revenue Office, were threatened with like attempts, there was a kind of state of siege among the Government Departments. Detachments of Guards, with their formidable bearskins, marched up and down, the lobbies of the various offices were lined with police, detectives flitted to and fro, and everybody with a black bag

was subject to detention and rigorous examination.

One result, indeed, which followed from this natural scare was to discredit the carrying of black leather bags. Before that date the custom was almost universal; the lawyer carried his papers, the Civil servant his luncheon, the commercial man his correspondence, in these convenient little receptacles. You might almost gauge a man's progress in the world by his bag. A step towards success involved a new black bag with patent lock, etc.; when his bag became worn and shabby, as surely his fortunes were on the declining scale. But now the black bag fell into disgrace. He who carried one was avoided, especially in railway carriages. If there was anything in his bag that clicked he would be pointed out to the police as a dangerous character.

Happily the dynamite troubles seem, although it does not do to boast, fairly laid to rest so far, at least, as England is concerned. It is not quite the case in Ireland, where Christmas Day had a surprise for Dublin in the shape of a dynamite explosion in the lower Castle Yard, resulting unhappily in the death of a detective officer. A previous explosion, also in Dublin Castle, on the last day of December, 1891, wrecked the office of the Treasury Solicitor, but damaged no human creature. Indeed, the dynamiters with whom we have to deal seem to avoid, as far as is possible in their dreadful trade, the sacrifice of human life, and have none of the uncompromising courage and atrocity of the dynamiters of Paris.

THE MAKING OF A POLITICIAN.

DURING that legendary period known as "once upon a time," in "great families" it appears to have been the habit to map out the futures of the sons upon certain prescribed lines, as a mere matter of course. One son always had to be a politician—a statesman it was probably called—another always had to be a soldier, a third always had to go into the Church. The "family" had a pocket borough of its own, which, of course, one of the sons of the house was bound to fill. Then there was the family living, and at least one commission could be had for the asking. Thus it came about that, in those halcyon days, budding politicians were, so to speak, marked men, even from their earliest hours, and were

specially trained for the work which they would have to do. They trained statesmen then as we train pugilists now. There was a regular prescribed course of training through which they had to go. It was taken for granted that no one but a "gentleman" could be a statesman—or even a politician. The embryo legislator went, as of course, to a public school, where some attempt was made to teach him all languages, except those which would be likely to be of any use to him, and especially his own. From the public school he passed to a University, if only in an ornamental sense. Leaving the University, accompanied by a bear-leader, he went on what was called the "grand tour." That "grand tour" appears to have been regarded in a light which we find it a trifle difficult to understand. A trip abroad was, in those days, guaranteed to do much more than it is guaranteed to do to-day. When the young gentleman returned home, the politician was trained. That "grand tour," acting as a sort of magical elixir, had finished the job. The "rising statesman" was slipped into the pocket borough, and for the rest of his life he ruled, and he was qualified to rule, his native land.

Nowadays, our politicians are not trained as they used to be. For one sufficient reason—there are no pocket boroughs. Probably few of the latter-day sons of our "great families" are destined from their earliest hours to be immolated on the altar of their country's politics.

What would be the use of it? One might go on the "grand tour" over and over and over again, and yet remain without a seat to the last day of his life. At least, such is the theory. Since, then, the old methods are forsaken in the present year of grace, how are our politicians trained? In other words, how comes a man to be a politician at all, a maker of his country's laws? The answer is, I fancy—in a good many ways. From the point of view of the irreverent outsider, funny ways some of them are.

Johnes—he writes it Johnes, although his father didn't—Johnes was a dealer in stocks and shares. He made a heap of money—such a heap that he made up his mind to "cut" the house and get clear off with his booty before the pendulum had time to swing, and some friendly colleague made "a bit" out of him. He did. He retired into private life. How it bored him! He was a clever fellow—in his way, a very clever man indeed. He went on

the "grand tour"—in the modern style. He wandered about the queer corners of the world for two whole years, and, while wandering, he thought things out. What was he to do with life, now that he had won for himself the right to make the most of it? He did not mind a little of what is called society. But of that he felt that enough was as good as a feast. The rôle of country gentleman he loathed—it meant stagnation. Rather than stagnate, it would be better to go back to stocks and shares. He liked to see a good race as well as most men. He shot, hunted, fished fairly well. But as to devoting the rest of his life to the pursuit of sport, he felt that, so far as he was himself concerned, it was out of the question. He had no particular hobby of any sort. What should he do? He would be hanged, he exclaimed in a sudden flash of inspiration, if he would not try politics. It was the humour of the thing, almost as much as anything else, which appealed to him. He had the instincts, and the genius, of a gambler. He had always understood that, in many respects, the game of politics was as big a gamble as a man could want. It offered abundant opportunities for excitement—and excitement of some sort was as the very breath of Johnes's nostrils. It gave a man a certain sort of position. And, if it were followed up, as Johnes always followed up everything which he went in for, it gave a man a career in life. So, between the evening and the morning of a certain day, Johnes became a politician. And it was after he became a politician that the laugh came in.

The politics of the "great families" were settled at the Flood. It was written in time that unto eternity they were to be Whigs—or Tories. The Johneses in this respect never were predestined. His politics had not been made for Johnes. Johnes had to make his own. It is true enough that, in a mild sort of way, he had always been Conservative; he had even voted Conservative when he voted at all. So he decided, on the whole, that perhaps it would be about as well if he remained Conservative. On the other hand, he did not know much about that sort of thing, and he was not quite clear, in his own mind, how City men of his stamp were regarded in the Conservative strongholds. He was still in the position of a man who, hesitating, is lost, when he encountered an acquaintance who offered to put him up for the Two Hundred and

Seventy Club. So the acquaintance put Johnes up, and the thing was done. Last election Johnes stood as a violent Radical. If I remember rightly he took up Total Abstinence, Sunday Closing, One Man One Vote, Disestablishment, Triennial Parliaments, Payment of Members, Free Food for the Masses, Inspection of Music-halls, and Trafalgar Square. No, he did not get in; but I do not think he is dissatisfied, though I fancy he is reconsidering his position. At the next election I should not be at all surprised to see him climb off the Radical platform and off some of his other platforms, too. In time I dare say he will get in, though possibly on a Tory ticket. Once in, it is quite on the cards that he will make his mark. If he rides to a fall, he will probably have his own over cleverness to thank. Though, in my judgement, Johnes runs a very good chance of being the future greatest statesman this age and this land has seen.

That was how Johnes was made a politician. Let us take some one else—this time a prominent man—and “try back” to his beginnings. Who shall we take? There is Bounder, one of the smartest debaters, if not one of the greatest orators we have—Bounder, the man of the people. Let us take Bounder. Principally for this reason, that Bounder is a type, a representative of a class of men who form, at a moderate estimate, some sixty or seventy per cent. of England’s heaven-sent rulers.

It is quite on the cards that Bounder will one day be Prime Minister. It is by no means certain what party he will represent on that august occasion. The fact is, Bounder calls himself one thing, and his friends and enemies are apt, now and then, to call him another. Bounder is a power, not only in the House, but also in the country. And so he ought to be. He represents the Great Middle Class, Commerce, the Art of Making a Fortune; he is a most respectable man is Bounder—in his way. He dresses so well, neat as ninepence sort of man. His presence of mind is, perhaps, his strongest point. No one ever put Bounder to confusion, and never will. He began on the vestry, then rose to be J.P., then commenced his famous manoeuvres in the local field of politics. As an outside politician he was one of the dodgiest dodgers who ever yet was known, and since he engineered himself into the House, he has certainly

never given a living soul the slightest cause to forget his former reputation. Bounder is a Radical, on the popular lines of to-day. He is one of that large group of rich men who are pledged to Raise the Masses, at absolutely no cost to themselves, and who manage to spend on luxurious living some fifty thousand pounds or so a year while doing so. Bounder is a great authority on the land laws. Having no land of his own, he is anxious that land, generally, should be placed more within the reach of the people. He has no great admiration for the Income Tax, as he has stated publicly on so many memorable occasions; the obnoxious impost certainly must make a dreadful hole in Bounder’s income. There is one thing to be said for Bounder; he is a man of wide toleration. Not an anti-everythingite, nor one of those who “compound the sins they are inclined to, by damning those they have no mind to.” That is one reason why I, for one, feel sure that a great future is in store for Bounder. I do not know what his principles are—and by that I mean that I do not even know what he pretends that his principles are—except that I am morally persuaded that the words “Bounder’s Benefit” are written in letters of flaming fire upon his heart; but I am convinced that, in the not far-off future, a majority of Englishmen will insist upon having, as a ruler, a “statesman” who will be willing to let them alone; who will suffer them, in a great measure, to rule themselves; who will not attempt to make them live the life which he and his particular friends may like to live; and who will not compel them to do the things which, because they suit his constitution, he takes it for granted will suit theirs.

A wide field for consideration is opened when we begin to reflect how, in their beginnings, some politicians were made. What made Oskins a politician? Oskins, the end and aim of whose being is, as he phrases it, the total eradication of the tobacco plant from off the surface of the earth. Oskins thinks that all the crime, and all the suffering, and all the misery of the world come from the use of tobacco. Take away tobacco, and, according to Oskins, “that would be Heaven,” not only for Oskins, but for all of us. The universal panacea, according to Oskins, is not somebody’s pills, or Tickle’s ointment, but “down with tobacco.” That comes first. All the rest—if there is any

rest!—comes afterwards. The joke of the thing is, that Oskins is not an inmate of an asylum for idiots, he is an inmate of the House of Commons—a politician; and there are quite a number of politicians who, in one respect, are just like Oskins, they all have universal panaceas to offer.

There is Slapton, who has been crying aloud for years, "Open everything on Sundays!" That seems to be his remedy for, at any rate, most of the evils which beset humanity. "Give the people free concerts on Sunday afternoons," cries Slapton, "and popular entertainments at popular prices on Sunday evenings, and see how much happier, and better, the world would be." Clapton, on the other hand, declares—and he represents that declaration in the House of Commons—that, to ensure the future welfare of the human race, the one thing needful is to shut up everything on Sundays—everything, that is, except the chapels and the churches. He would have no trains running on what he, oddly and, so far as I understand the matter, ignorantly, insists upon calling "the Sabbath day," no omnibuses, no cabs, no hotels open, no clubs, no public parks, no public institutions—in fact, no nothing. From what I have been able to gather from the—thank goodness!—little I have read of Clapton's numerous public utterances, having shut up everything—except the chapels and churches—Clapton would, probably, proceed to compel, by Act of Parliament, every person to attend some form of religious service at least twice each Sunday. I am not clear what form of religious service it would be. I suspect that a man's choice would ultimately be narrowed to that form of religious service which Clapton honours with his own great presence.

How came such men to be politicians? How were they made? Seriously, one is disposed to believe that, nowadays, however it may have been once upon a time, one qualification which goes to the making of a politician is an insatiable desire to thrust one's fingers into other people's pies; a deep-rooted yearning to mind everybody else's business, not except, but as well as, one's own. As we moderns manage things, in this "right little, tight little" island, a born busybody is within measurable distance of being a born politician. Get a bee in your bonnet, and, if you glance into some men's dictionaries, you will find that you are

a statesman, ready made. You must have a "cry," that is all you want, a "cry." It is impossible to go to the country without a "cry." But with a "cry," it is possible that you may reach the Treasury benches in half-a-dozen strides. Think of the "cries" there are. Think of the men, in the present House of Commons, each of whom represents a "cry" of his own, from A to Z, from the interests of Agriculture to the principles of the Zollverein. The more successful politicians—as politicians go—play their game on some such lines as these. They get a "cry." If such a "league" does not already exist, they promote a "league" to support the "cry." They scour heaven and earth for subscriptions to support the "league." The "league" makes itself such an insupportable nuisance both inside the House and out of it, that the politician whom it represents, and who represents it, has to be conciliated.

We are, men, women, and children, all of us, "mixed pickles." Beyond doubt, in each of us there is a spice of humbug. Should the days of the fairies return, and should, on a full night, that spice of humbug be taken clean out of the House of Commons, what revelations would be made to an astonished country! What sights would be seen! How many men would there be found who believed, really and truly believed, with that faith which moves mountains, in their own "cries," who believed in their own missions, in their own universal panaceas? Would there be one man found who, in that hour in which the cold, dry light of absolute truth was shining down upon the whole assembly, would be able to assert that he believed that his pet scheme would do all that he had claimed for it? Would there be one who would be able to assert that he had been as much in earnest, as single-minded, in his preaching, as he would have had the world believe? Above and beyond all, would there be one who would be able to assert that he had taken up the trade of politics only for his country's sake, and not one jot nor one tittle for his own?

One can picture such a scene. One can conceive the usual talkee-talkie going on, and then, in an instant, the fairy visitation. One can see with the mind's eye the crowd of startled faces; the change coming over the spirit of the scene; as it were, the sudden lifting of unseen curtains; the look which each man

gives at his neighbours' faces; his astonishment at what he sees written there. If the gallery men only kept their heads, and faithfully printed all the observations which reached their ears, what a marvellous debate would be reported in the papers which are placed upon the nation's breakfast-tables in the morning!

Let us set down naught in malice. But who, who has had only even occasional peeps behind the scenes, can doubt that our rulers, taking them in the lump, have scarcely a particle of the faith which marks certain sections of the ruled? Study the division lists. Notice the steady, and even admirable persistence, with which Popton supported the Cheap Cheese Bill. Why? Do you suppose it was because Popton believed in it? If you do, you are an innocent indeed. You are aware that there has been a strong "cry" in favour of the Cheap Cheese Bill. It has been stated, over and over again, with ever-increasing vehemence, that if the Cheap Cheese Bill only became law, one would be able to purchase three pounds of the best cheese for a penny, wars would cease, and the country would thrive. Popton's own private opinion, as he has frequently expressed it to his intimates, is, that there never was such nonsense as that Cheap Cheese "cry." "But if they want it," Popton was wont to say, "why, let them have it." So Popton voted for it. There is no profession of faith to which a politician would not be willing to attach his signature, if he thought that there were enough people asking for it. Examine the records of our more prominent politicians, living and dead, and see for yourself if it is not so. Politicians, like barristers, having received their briefs, are prepared to do their very best for their clients. One, now and then, throws up his brief. But the thing is rare. Whether they are briefed for or against, seems, as a rule, to be to them a matter of complete personal indifference.

One may doubt if an eminent politician has any deep-rooted political opinions whatever of his own. I sometimes think that, of all men living, the eminent politician has the least belief in politics. I fancy that, if Bounder had a really free hand, he would be willing to offer his support to any scheme of legislation of any sort or kind, holding the simple faith that it would not make one pin's worth of difference either one way or the other. Upon that point, I wonder how many people are

of Bounder's way of thinking. I, for one, am disposed to pair with Bounder. I seriously doubt if, after you have done with the four R's, the rudiments, legislation has any effect whatever upon the life of a nation—that is, I not only doubt whether people can be made moral by Act of Parliament, but I doubt if they can be made anything by Act of Parliament. And I am conscious of an absolute conviction that, at any rate, only an infinitesimal minority of the Members of the House of Commons believe they can.

The men who nowadays represent what are called "labour interests," have they any faith in the divinity of Acts of Parliament? I wonder! Some folks seem to entertain an idea that the millennium can be brought about by Act of Parliament. I suspect that that idea is as old as creation, and still we are about where we were. If that particular section of a class which arrogates to itself the title of "labouring class"—if I am not a "labourer," I wish to heaven that some one would revise our dictionaries!—is better off this year than it was a hundred years ago, it is still a fact that it was quite as well off two hundred years ago, although it was worse off again if you turn the two hundred into three. The pendulum swings; classes, like individuals, are up to-day and down to-morrow. But that fact has nothing to do with Acts of Parliament. It never did have, and it never will. There is a power which shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will, but there is reason to doubt if that power has even a nodding acquaintance with the pranks and prancings of the British House of Commons.

Let it not be supposed that I am suggesting that politicians, as a class, are worse than other men. Not a bit of it. In this world, as it is at present constituted, we must all of us be something, and why should not some of us be politicians?

I once heard a story which throws a lurid light upon the little that, in the present year of grace, is wanted for the making of a politician. There was a certain village cobbler—cobblers, from time immemorial, have, almost beyond all other men, had "views" on the government of peoples. This particular cobbler was a perfect firebrand. He was for "Down with everything," especially with the gentlemen, whoever they might be, who happened to be in. No Minister ever did anything that pleased this cobbler, and never would, or ever could. He was especially great at

disturbing a meeting. His fame travelled over all those parts. When Sutor had been enjoying a sufficiency of "sixpenny," he could "do" for any meeting single-handed, until his friends and his enemies induced him to take himself head-foremost down the steps outside. It was understood that Sutor was good at argument on a pint, but that half a gallon made him as red-hot, vehement, emphatic, and earnest-minded a politician as ever lived.

Half a gallon! Well, that is something, anyhow. Sutor only became a "regular" politician when he began to lose his head. One may be forgiven for suspecting that many a man stands thereabouts with Sutor. A good many people seem to become politicians only when they have begun to lose their heads, and having become politicians, and continuing politicians, they continue, in a certain sense, to lose their heads, until, in some subtle way, they actually change their shapes and become quite different sort of men. They look at the world and the things in it with a distorted, that is, a political, vision. They are apt to altogether lose, not only their sense of proportion, but even of sane perception. And, really, to listen to them—to most of them; at any rate—you would think that they actually become able to persuade themselves, not only that black is white and that white is black, but that yesterday two and two made ninety-one, that to-day they make forty-three, and that to-morrow they will make nothing at all.

A MISSED SPRING.

SPRING flowers? Belovèd, lay them here,
And let me clasp with pressure dear

The hand that pulled for me
These bonny blossoms—snowdrops white,
Blue violets, yellow aconite,
And frail anemone.

From wood and garden that we know,
You gathered them before the snow
Has melted in the sun;
While yet the skies are grey above,
You gathered them with thoughts of love,
•For your poor wearied one.

Spring flowers! Ah! loyal heart and true,
Spring flowers for me, who never knew
The gladness of life's spring;
Who never felt the sunshine warm,
Whose youth was wrapped in cloud and storm,
The darkest fate could bring.

Unmeet for me. Yet lay them here,
Close to my hand, and draw a-near
With your grave, tender smile;
Nay, closer yet, that I may trace
Each feature of the well-known face,
Although I sigh the while.

Time-worn, but resolute, I see
The face that makes earth heaven to me
Through these my shortening days.
Grief-worn, but patient, it has cheered
My heart that doubted, shrank, and feared
In life's bewildering maze.

It might have made my summer bliss—
Ah, dearest! take it not amiss,
That I am sad to-day.
We met too late—dull autumn's time
Had touched our lives with chilling rime,
Our skies were bleak and grey.

We met too late—for us no spring
Might lead to summer blossoming;
And yet it might have been!
If I had known you when the flowers
Were budding in life's early hours,
And all hope's leaves were green!

It might have been! But ah! not now.
Too late, too late, for lover's vow,
Too late for wifely kiss.
Too late for dreams of love and home,
"The time of singing-birds is come,"
Sweet music I must miss.

Too late! But see! I take from you
The snowdrop white, the violet blue,
The pale anemone.
And, dear, I think that otherwhere,
A spring eternal, new and fair,
Doth wait for you and me.

PRIVATE HISTORY OF BHOGERAJ DOOSAD.

(INDIAN SYCE.)

BHOGERAJ DOOSAD was the name in which the subject of this narrative rejoiced, and which indicated the individual who for many years acted in the capacity of syce, or head-groom, in my modest establishment in the far East—that is to say, in Upper Bengal. When he first appeared on the scene he was about eighteen or nineteen years of age, well-featured, and symmetrical—indeed, unusually so—and might have figured as an Adonis among those of his complexion, for he was of a dark mahogany. His expression was pleasing and intelligent. He was married, I need hardly add, and presently became the parent of a little girl.

For a year or two nothing particular seemed to interrupt the even tenor of his way, but as time passed I noticed that the rounded outlines of his figure, at first almost girlish in their softness, were gradually giving place to those more muscular and perhaps more manly, if at the same time less comely, as if the cares of the world and of actual life were only now beginning to tell upon him. He was by degrees also developing a little amiable weakness for occasional turns of hilarity along with one or two social chums in the persons of his fellow-grooms,

in which palm-toddy played an important part. Of a quiet evening he would wake the welkin with his sonorous voice singing the love-lyrics of his native village, while his friends led up the chorus, and the other servants sat and listened admiringly from a distance. As his voice was rather musical and his ear accurate I rather enjoyed these songs, and did nothing to interrupt them. If any long interval occurred to show that they were flagging, and that their exponent was rather depressed, a gift of a rupee or so was always sufficient to set them going again, indicating, I am afraid, too surely where and how a part of that rupee had gone. However, the gentle stimulus did not seem to do him any harm, and perhaps did good, as some variety from the humble food which forms the usual diet of the average Indian villager. At all events, after such little hilarities he always seemed brisker for a day or two following, rather than the reverse. As a servant he was active and equal to every emergency.

The first thing that rather startled me in Bhogerāj's private career was, after he had been about four years in my service, when news was brought to him from his now distant village that he had become the happy parent of another daughter. Whereupon, instead of rejoicing as he might have been expected to do, and feasting his friends, he figuratively tore his hair, actually and really anathematised his ill-luck, and sent a cruel message back by the bearer of the news, instead of the funds which were asked for, saying that he would neither see nor have anything more to do with his wife. "He wanted a son; was he to be disgraced with daughters always coming, which were useless?" Shocked as I was at such a spirit, I could hardly believe he would act upon it, till, about six weeks later, his wife herself appeared on the scene with her infant child in her arms and the other by her side. She had come for funds, having been surprised at the long absence of any, especially at such a time, and hardly crediting the report that was brought to her. But Bhogerāj was obdurate. He turned a deaf ear to her appeals, and met her with looks sullen and relentless. Nor would he take the slightest notice of the children she placed down before him in the hope of moving him to compassion. At length, when the poor woman saw that matters had really reached a crisis, she cast aside the diffidence peculiar to her sex in the

country, and brought her complaint before me, in the hope that I might be able to influence Bhogerāj in the right direction. Accordingly I sent for him, and confronted him with his wife and children; but when questioned, remonstrated with, and threatened in turn, he gave me courteously to understand that I might beat him, dismiss him, that no matter what was done to him, he would have nothing more to do with his family. So, when this last hope was exhausted, the poor woman went away with her children on her henceforth separate road in life, taking with her, however, his now due month's pay, which I gave her along with a few added rupees. And as this was the first page of Bhogerāj's married life, so was it the last I heard or saw of his first family. Then, very soon it came to my ears that he had contracted a liaison in the village—not his native village, but that nearest my bungalow—and that with a woman of rather light reputation, and this now fully accounted to me for his previous heartless and seemingly inexplicable conduct; conduct which far exceeded the usual discontent of the Bengalee, and, indeed, generally of the native of India, with a family of daughters; and it besides lowered Bhogerāj still another degree in my estimate of him. This new friendship of his, however, did not last long. It had hardly begun when it ended, and in a way that brought grief and shame to Bhogerāj, which were described as a just retribution for his desertion of his wife and children.

After this he consoled himself with more frequent carnivals along with his fellow syces, which gradually degenerated into orgies. I came to learn that my stable was made the scene of these during the late hours of the night and on, it might be, into the small hours of the morning. When it came to this I considered it high time to interfere, for the sake of the safety and comfort of my horses if not for that of respectability; and this intention I had to enforce so decisively in the case at least of one of the erring syces, who was proved to have made attempts at continuance after being warned, that he seemed to cherish a sudden and strong resentment therefrom. Indeed, from his look I had a suspicion of some brooding mischief at the time, but which I could not then decipher. A day or two later one of my horses was seized with a sudden and strange illness, quite unlike anything I had ever, in my large experience of horses,

known before. In the morning it appeared ill, and by evening it died, stiffened with cramp all the time. But, ere this, I had no hesitation in ascribing the illness to poison; and on putting two thoughts together I further came to the conclusion that it was the outcome of my dealing with the refractory syca. He was as wily and treacherous-looking an Aryan as one might wish to meet, or rather to avoid; and the malignant look of triumph and mingled indifference which met me when I questioned him was ill concealed. I could obtain, however, little or no satisfaction for the loss, pecuniary or otherwise. The man was probably worth little more than the waist-cloth he stood in, and there was the difficulty of proving that the horse really died of poison, there being no veterinary surgeon thereabout, far or near, to attest the fact. Further, there was the question of proving who administered the poison; even though a little later on I heard, and might have been able to prove, that the suspected individual had been seen buying arsenic in the bazaar the day before the horse died. The superintendent of police, an Englishman, to whom I applied, suggested to me quietly that the only real "remedy" that lay in my hands was to inflict upon the evil-doer a sound corporal castigation and be done with him; and this advice I endeavoured honestly to carry out, though I feel sure that in the end the rascal felt himself nine times the winner. Bhogeraj I never suspected of having had a hand in the matter. He seemed too genuinely sorry for what had happened, and besides, despite his shortcomings, I believed him incapable of such an action.

The next eventful era in Bhogeraj's career occurred a year or so later, at another plantation or "factory" whither, along with me, he had migrated. It was when a neighbouring tenant of the "factory" came to complain that Bhogeraj had enticed and hidden away his—the tenant's—wife or "property" (mall), as, in common with his countrymen, he styled and regarded her. He said that she had even shamelessly deserted her infant child, let alone her affectionate husband and all her household cares and duties, including the preparation of her lord and master's meals, at all which he was very sad and downcast. Bhogeraj, on being summoned, denied the soft impeachment, as regarded at least the enticing away, and affirmed that she had left of her own

accord owing to ill-treatment by her husband. He seemed inclined, too, to deny any knowledge of her whereabouts, or that she had come to him; but on this point being pressed through accumulating proof, he then averred, somewhat ungallantly, that she had come to him of her own free will, and without any arts or blandishments on his part towards that end. He declared that she would have run away in any case, owing to her husband's ill-usage. It was then urged upon him that he must produce the woman, so that the question might, as far as practicable, be cleared up between the three faces to face. After some little persuasion he departed reluctantly to bring her. On his returning shortly she appeared in his company, a young and rather good-looking woman of fair complexion, and, like her husband, of the "Bunyia," or meal-dealer caste. And this rather surprised me. I wondered that under the circumstances her husband should make any effort to bring her back, for by openly taking up with a lower caste, or rather non-caste, she had outcasted herself and was therefore inadmissible again into her husband's family, unless with the result of the similar outcasting of them all. I could not, therefore, quite comprehend his motive, and it seemed to puzzle the natives themselves, but presently I saw into it clearer.

The woman on confronting her husband maintained a quiet demeanour, while he exhibited a pitiable aspect of entreaty and appeal. He adjured her to return to her home and household duties; drew a pathetic picture of what would become of the child without her, which he now wanted to place in her arms, but which she made no advance towards receiving. He folded his hands towards her in supplication as he would do towards his Brahmin priest, looked piteously at her, and besought her again and again, in the most pleading tones, to return, but still she made no responsive sign, and I was half beginning to think that she was rather hardened in her course. Then Bhogeraj interposed and said that he—the husband—had ill-used her, and that if he got her back again he would kill her. But certainly I saw little of such a truculent nature in the abject and whining figure before me. Such a piteous display, indeed, did he make of himself that when he found words and entreaties were of no avail, he bent down to kiss the ground at her feet, as the utmost humiliation he

could inflict on himself in order to get her back, though amid the remonstrances and disgust of the natives around. Then, just as I had turned round again after making some enquiry of Bhogerāj or one of those present, I caught the momentary fleeting remnant of a glance cast upon her full of malignant and vindictive meaning. The mask had unexpectedly fallen, and quick though the effort to resume the previous disguise, I had already seen through it. All the grovelling and whining, the man's apparent disregard of caste in order to get his wife back, were now explained. It was simply to take revenge on her, and that doubtless in a diabolical fashion, in keeping with a well-known and too common custom of the country in such cases, as Bhogerāj also suggested.

Our ayah, who was standing near with her young charge in the verandah, must also have caught sight of the glance and have been of the same opinion, for she murmured: "If the man gets her back he'll terribly ill use her, and won't leave her life." As for the woman herself she must have penetrated the mask all along, for the momentary dropping of it seemed to come to her as no surprise. She only maintained her refusal to return to him. Proof also was accumulating that the man had really, as Bhogerāj stated, used her badly. So, seeing how the wind lay, I merely said that I could not interfere in the matter in any way, nor would countenance force or violence. The man, it may be added, had disseminated the threat the evening before that, sword in hand by night, in company with his friends, he would search all the wheat and barley fields in the neighbourhood for his wife, among which she was supposed to have remained concealed with the connivance of Bhogerāj, and that he would not cease till he found her. The ominous meaning conveyed in that threat was obvious, though I suspected that there was as much bravado in it as anything else. On hearing the above decision, however, and seeing that the need for further disguise had now ceased, his aspect changed, and a wicked look came over his face. They all went their different ways, however, the "aggrieved husband" with his child in his arms towards his hamlet a couple of hundred yards away, though reluctantly, and casting menacing and vindictive looks at his wife as he retreated; she towards the servants' quarters of my establishment. Thinking that the matter was so far at rest, I was

just about to recline on a sofa for my afternoon siesta, a couple of hours later, when the ayah came into the room with excited looks, saying that the man was at that moment dragging his wife away from the servants' quarters by force, had pulled all her clothing off in the act, regardless of decency and of everything but to get possession of her, and that none of the servants had the courage to interfere between a man and his "property" (wife).

Hurrying out, I saw, indeed, that he was dragging her away as described, and also by the hair of her head. The cowardly creed-and-custom-bound servants, though more or less sympathising with the woman, as I had gathered from their demeanour, were all standing gaping, as the ayah had stated, averse to interfere. Presently the man, catching sight of me hurrying on at my best tropical pace, dropped his prey, and with a look of baffled rage took to his heels, vowing future vengeance against her, as every now and again in his retreat he turned round ere reaching his house to give vent to his threats. I had only come out in time, however, as he had already got her half-way to there, ultimately dragging her along the ground on her stumbling and falling.

The ayah by this time had hurried up with the needed clothing, and then conveyed the woman into safe quarters, while a hint from me to the stalwart bungalow "chowkidār," or watchman—a man of the "thief caste" employed on the principle of "thief to catch thief," and in whose charge I could safely trust my bungalow and all its contents—to keep his eyes open prevented any further risk of a similar occurrence. Had the man, however, been successful in taking the woman to his house, I could not then have so judiciously interfered; while the plan of punishment or revenge he would have adopted would have been the ordinary one for infidelity, suspected or real, as practised by the enlightened Hindoo husband, who constitutes himself at once judge, jury, and executive of the offence. It would have been to bind her hand and foot, then to pass a rope from her bound wrists over a rafter of the roof above so as to raise her up to her tiptoes, and thereupon to brand her body in various places with a hot iron, as indelible marks for her to carry about in memory of her offence. Whether he might accompany or follow up this with various lashings with a bamboo sapling till he left her more dead than alive would, of course,

depend on his humour, and be no uncommon occurrence.

After this I heard no more of the matter for some days. The injured husband was, it was averred, gradually becoming injured, if not reconciled, to his loss. At all events, he appeared to be making no further attempts to regain his wife; while she disappeared again, no one could say where, except presumably that she was somewhere in hiding under Bhogerâj's guardianship. So time passed on till in about a month I heard that he was preparing to give a great feast to his caste-villagers, who had become hostile on account of his conduct, and refused to eat with him, and that for this purpose he had been saving up for some weeks. This, by the way, is the usual mode, namely, through an appeal to the stomach, of appeasing the caste-tribunal or tribal-council which, as a rule, sits in judgement on the graver moral delinquencies of the members of its caste or tribe. In due time the feast came off, which consisted of boiled rice and curdled milk, and about fifty of Bhogerâj's villagers left, with their hearts softened towards him and their benediction on his proposal to marry the helpmate he had now taken up with; which sanction, by the way, he had previously made an understood condition of the feast. He was not, he said, going "to throw away his money for nothing." At this feast it was said that even the forlorn husband was present, as affable as any, and had signified his assent to the new arrangement. He too, probably, was looking about elsewhere to console himself. Thus all ended favourably for Bhogerâj, better, perhaps, than he deserved. He was received back into the fellowship of his caste, and shortly after the feast he married the woman and settled again into the life of a respectable domestic man, according, at least, to the tenets of his caste or tribe. After this, he resumed his evening ditties, with care now uplifted from his mind, except such as in due course attended the increase of his second family with its associated expenses. An extra rupee now and again, however, always sufficed as before to drive away dull care whenever it appeared too visibly to overshadow him; and what between his hookah, his songs, and his social gossip amid his circle of fellow-grooms or other servants around their evening fire—at least, during the cold season—added to an occasional gallon or two of palm-toddy on

bazaar days, he seemed to pass a generally merry and care-absent life. When I left the country a year or two later I felt sorry to part with him, as with some other servants, to whom, with their simple, faithful services, one becomes really attached during a long residence in India, and did my best to make the parting, in a practicable form, as mild to him and to them as possible.

A BREAD-AND-BUTTER MISS.

A STORY IN SIX CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

WE were all hard at work making rushlight dips. When I say "we," I mean Theodora (myself), Wilhelmina, Hermione, Victoria, Alice, Mary, Jack, and Bob. It will be observed that we elder ones had been treated generously as regards names, our parents having considered, properly enough, that as they could give us very little else it would be a pity to stint us in that particular. But after the fourth girl they grew careless, and took the first names that occurred to them, and were not much trouble to pronounce.

I wonder whether many people know how to make rushlight dips, or have any idea what an engrossing occupation it is, particularly when one is allowed only half an inch of candle to go to bed by. The following is our recipe. First we catch our rushes; that is to say, we make an expedition to the nearest marsh, where at the cost of wet feet and dragged skirts, we secure a bundle of fine fat rushes. Next we melt our candle-ends, the result of many weeks' saving, into a mould made by Bob, the mechanical genius of the family, and into this we dip our rushes. I must candidly admit that our home-made dips were never a very brilliant success. Still, by dint of humouring and coaxing, they could be induced to burn for a little while, and we, their proud manufacturers, thought their fitful illumination superior to gas, or even to electric light.

We were busily engaged in peeling our rushes, and melting the candle-ends into which they were to be dipped, when mother appeared at the school-room door with a letter in her hand.

"Theodora," she said, calling me by my full name for almost the first time in my life, "I want to speak to you for a minute in my room."

There was an ominous solemnity in her tone and manner which made my heart sink, for I fancied that a scolding must be in store for me for some crime of unusual magnitude. I followed our parent from the room, but little consoled by the sympathetic glances of the rest of the family.

"Theo," began mother, as soon as the door closed behind us, "do you remember going to see Cara Broughton three years ago, when I took you to town to have your teeth looked at?"

Considering that I had only once been in town in my life, and that our cousin, Mrs. Broughton, was the only person I had been taken to see except the dentist, I was not likely to have forgotten her. On the contrary, I remembered clearly the beautiful house in Grosvenor Gardens, the imposing-looking servants, the pictures and ornaments in the drawing-room, and, best of all, Mrs. Broughton's liveliness and good-nature.

"When Theo is grown up," she had then said to mother, "you must let her come and stay with me, and I will find her a good husband with at least ten thousand a year."

Whereupon mother had shaken her head, and said that Cousin Cara had not forgotten how to talk nonsense. The little scene came back to me vividly enough at the moment in question.

"Oh, yes," I replied readily. "Of course I remember Cousin Cara. She was very kind, and sent me a box of French sweets the Christmas after we saw her."

"Well, she doesn't appear to have forgotten you either," continued mother. "She has written to ask if I will allow you to go and stay with them at Oaklands, their country place in Norfolk. They are going to have a shooting party, and you are asked for the First."

She paused to note the effect she had produced. Seeing me speechless with astonishment, she proceeded.

"Of course you are not really out, and under other circumstances I should not allow you to be seen until you were presented. However, as there is no chance of that, perhaps the best thing we can do is to get you a few tidy clothes, and start you off to Norfolk, transformed into a grown-up young lady. You wouldn't be bad-looking if you were decently dressed, and I don't think you are altogether devoid of common-sense, or I wouldn't trust you alone in such a very modern country house as Oaklands."

Our parent has no illusions on the subject of her offspring, so I felt myself blushing crimson with pride and gratification at these very modified compliments.

"Of course it is of no use your going if you are likely to be shy and miserable," resumed mother. "You will understand what poverty means after a week spent among a lot of smart people, better than after a lifetime here in Dewmead. At Cara Broughton's you will certainly be the worst-dressed girl of the party, and you will be completely out of it as far as the sayings and doings of society are concerned. Still, you are not likely to have many opportunities of seeing the world, so perhaps it is a pity you should lose this one, unless you think you would be happier at home."

"Oh, mother," I gasped, "if I really may, I should love to go and stay with Cousin Cara!"

"Well, well," she said, smiling, "I have given you your choice. Don't blame me if life in a country house is not all your fancy paints it."

I went back to the school-room, feeling, for the first time in my life, that I was a personage of importance, to whom the doors of society were flung open, whose presence was actually desired at a fashionable country house. I entered the room with a step that had acquired dignity, if not weight.

"Well, what's wrong? Has anything happened? Have you been catching it?" were the questions that greeted me from the group round the table.

"Oh dear, no," I replied, with an assumption of calm indifference. "It was nothing. Only an invitation for me to stay with Mrs. Broughton at her country house in Norfolk. She is going to have a shooting party for the First."

I was gratified to see that my news caused about as great a shock of astonishment to my family as if I had announced that I had been invited to join a lion hunt in the interior of Africa. There was a moment of dead silence, the silence of overwhelming surprise. Then Jack, with the frankness that is seldom attained except by a brother, exclaimed:

"But you won't know how to behave."

I felt that I could afford to treat this remark with pitying contempt, so I contented myself with the invariably effective, if somewhat threadbare, family repartee:

"You shouldn't judge of other people by yourself, Jack."

Then Mina, who comes next to me, and is dreadfully precocious for her sixteen years, recovered her powers of speech.

"Oh, you lucky girl!" she exclaimed. "Won't you feel like a real live heroine with a whole novel to live through! Think of having a shooting party to talk to! Why, you've scarcely ever spoken to any men except clergymen, and they don't count. Fancy meeting real men who smoke cigars, and drink brandy and sodas, and bet, and perhaps"—in awestruck tones—"even swear!"

"That wouldn't give me any particular gratification," I said, laughing. "Besides, of course they wouldn't swear before me."

"N-no, I suppose not," said Mina half regretfully, "unless they forgot. I wonder whether anybody will make love to you; they always do in books."

"Make love to Theo," put in Bob. "Why, she's nothing but a little girl, and no beauty either. I don't deny you can play tennis decently," he went on, relenting somewhat, "and I have seen worse long-stops. Perhaps if there's some fellow there who thinks more of games than looks or accomplishments, he may let you play with him when he can't get anybody better."

"Thank you, you're very kind," I returned, too well used to the family frankness to feel in the slightest degree ruffled by these remarks. "As it happens, I don't intend to pose as a heroine at all, and I don't expect any adventures worthy of a novel. I mean to enjoy myself if I can, and anyhow I shall have heaps to tell you when I come home."

During the fortnight that elapsed between the arrival of the invitation and my departure for Oaklands, my wardrobe in all its branches formed the principal topic of conversation in the family circle. No wonder the boys grumbled, and said that their holidays were quite spoiled by Theo's clothes. Jack declared that I used to ask for the silk, instead of the milk, at breakfast, and that my tea consisted of bread and buttons; while Bob complained that baby ribbons and beaded fringe were always getting into his holiday task, which should have been an essay on the Thirty Years' War. Yet the average fashionable young woman would assuredly have looked with deep disdain upon the very modest outfit with which I was about to make my entrance into society.

"It is quite hopeless to attempt to be smart," mother had decided with her usual

excellent sense. "The best plan I can think of is that you should appear to be in half-mourning. That, and extreme youth, will account for a good deal of dowdiness. And, after all, nothing is so becoming as black and white."

From what I have said it will be gathered that we were poor, but there are many degrees of poverty, and ours came very near the bottom of the scale. Indeed, on looking back, I often wonder how we managed to cut our coats according to our cloth, and yet preserve decency. As the Honourable Katherine Macwheal, mother had offended all her relations by insisting on marrying father, who was only plain Captain Western of the 150th Rifles, with very little besides his pay, and a V.C., which of course was not much help towards the housekeeping. In spite of narrow means and many children mother very contentedly followed the drum until about five years before the time of which I am writing, when father caught typhoid fever, and died after only a few days' illness.

Mother's family had hitherto sternly ignored her existence, but now a Macwheal uncle came forward and offered to lend her a house in the little village of Dewmead, the chief advantages of which were the cheapness of living and the purity of the air. The offer was accepted, and in Dewmead we had lived happily enough ever since, for the poverty which was the only drawback to our lot sat lightly as yet upon us children. As for mother, she was one of those unconscious philosophers who seem incapable of worrying either themselves or other people.

The days before my departure passed rapidly away, thanks to the amount of stitching and contriving that had to be accomplished. As the time for my departure drew near, I became conscious of a certain feeling of anxiety as to what might be awaiting me in the strange unknown world I was about to enter. After all, there might be something in Jack's fraternal remark, "You won't know how to behave." Perhaps Bob, too, had been a true prophet when he asserted that my only claim to attention would lie in my skill at tennis.

I was not allowed to set forth upon my travels without some valuable advice as well as a very limited trousseau.

"Try and cultivate a thick skin and a sense of humour," said mother, as she helped me to pack on the last evening.

"I have kept up my spirits under all sorts of difficulties and disagreeables, thanks to those two most useful properties. Again, hold up your head, and look as if you expected attention, and you will probably get it. My old dancing mistress used to say that all girls look much the same in a ball-room, but that the one who carries her head the best is picked out as the belle. Don't be too much ashamed of your shabby clothes. Remember that youth is the finest of all frocks, and the only one that never goes out of fashion. Lastly, don't let any of your new friends spoil you, or fill your head with nonsense, but enjoy yourself as much as you can, and come home the same honest, sensible little girl you go away."

The next morning witnessed my departure in solitary state for the new world that awaited me in that far-away country house. Each member of the family solemnly presented me with a parting gift. Even seven-year-old May had spent the sixpence that represented her whole fortune upon a would-be tortoiseshell hairpin of colouring more curious than natural. Bob's present of a box of birds' eggs, collected by himself, was rather difficult to pack safely, but I did not like to hurt his feelings by leaving it at home.

A long, wearisome journey to Hornby Junction, the nearest station to Oaklands, and then a three-mile drive behind a pair of fast-trotting cobs, brought me to my destination, a large white house, approached by a splendid avenue of wide-spreading oaks. The venerable-looking butler who received me, informed me in sad, confidential tones that tea was served on the terrace, where Mrs. Broughton awaited me. Then he spirited me softly across a great hall, and out on to a broad, sunny terrace, where a little group was seated round a remarkably well-laden tea-table. A stout, vivacious-looking little woman, whom I recognised as Cousin Cara, sprang up and came towards me with outstretched hands, and an expansive greeting that quite won my heart.

"Here you are at last," she exclaimed. "You must be half-dead after your long journey. How you have grown; I should never have known you again! Will you have tea or coffee? Oh, I mustn't forget the introductions: Lady Downham, Mrs. Wynscott, Lord Regie Gayford. They all know who you are, because I have been telling them you were coming, and all about you."

As she paused to take breath, I looked round upon my new acquaintances. Lady Downham was reclining at great length in an easy-chair—length, indeed, was the most striking part of her appearance. She was not only long-limbed, but her nose and upper lip were long, and so were the limp fingers that she gave me to shake. The only thing about her that did not appear to be long was her tongue, for she bestowed not a single word upon me.

Mrs. Wynscott, on the other hand, struck me as the loveliest creature I had ever beheld; indeed, I scarcely dared look at her for fear of showing my admiration too plainly. Her dusky golden hair was arranged in little baby curls, which harmonised admirably with the innocence of her wide-open blue eyes. A mouth of the order of Cupid's bow, a peach-like bloom, and a small Grecian nose, completed a picture the only defect of which was the reminiscence it aroused of the beautiful ladies whose portraits adorn the lids of bonbon-boxes. This vision of loveliness bestowed on me a smile that displayed a set of irreproachable teeth, and murmured in sweet, monotonous tones:

"You must be so tired! Travelling is such a bore, isn't it? I do hate travelling, don't you?"

"I have travelled so little," I replied. "This is the longest journey I have ever taken. I got tired of being alone; but I think I should enjoy travelling if I had some one nice with me."

"Ah, but think of the difficulty of finding the some one nice," put in Lord Regie. "I am always searching for that some one nice, but when I find her it does not follow that she will travel with me."

I turned and looked at the speaker. He was rather short and plump, with nothing distinctive about him except a pair of twinkling eyes behind aggressive eye-glasses, and a pertly-twisted moustache.

"But there are always relations," I said in answer to his remark.

This innocent observation seemed to cause a good deal of amusement to the rest of the party.

"Yes, that is a melancholy fact," said Lord Regie, with a deep sigh. "There are always relations; but, thank Heaven, one is not obliged to travel with them. Who ever numbered a really nice person among his nearest and dearest?"

"Now don't talk disrespectfully of

relations before Miss Western," put in Cousin Cara. "She is rich in those doubtful blessings. By the way, how are all the children?" she added. "I am ashamed to say I can't remember their names or ages."

"Mina and Vic and Alice are quite well, thank you," I returned promptly. "Hermione and May have got colds. Jack and Bob are going back to school to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear such a good account," murmured my hostess, looking rather overwhelmed, while Lord Regie's eye-glasses fell off his nose into the teacup. "Now do have some cake; I dare say you have starved all day."

"Oh, no, I haven't," I replied, as I helped myself to a large hunch of cake. "I had some sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs with me, and I got two Bath buns and a glass of milk at Liverpool Street, but of course I am hungry again now."

There was a short pause after I had uttered this speech, during which the rest of the party appeared to be regarding me with a kind of envious admiration.

"How perfectly exquisite!" sighed Lord Regie, as he readjusted his glasses. "Do you know I can remember the time when I too was attached to Bath buns! No emotion in after life can ever equal that early passion. What a misfortune it is that we can't always remain faithful to buns and other simple but satisfying pleasures!"

"I think eating is such a bore, don't you?" drawled Mrs. Wyncott. "At least, when you ain't hungry. And we never have time to get hungry; we're always at it."

"I intend to try starving you all some day," remarked Mrs. Broughton. "It will be a new sensation for you. Now, Theo, if you've quite finished, I'll take you to your room. I dare say you will like to rest a little while before dressing for dinner."

She led the way into the house, up a broad staircase, and through long corridors till at length we reached a little pink and white room which seemed to me the very perfection of prettiness and comfort.

"Now you will have plenty of time to rest," said Cousin Cara. "We don't dine till eight. My maid Simpson shall unpack for you and do your hair. How you have improved since I last saw you!" she added. "But you were at the awkward age then. Now the ugly duckling has turned into something very like a swan."

"Only an egret, I'm afraid," I said, glancing at my reflection in the glass. "I'm sure I look dingy enough at this moment."

Mrs. Broughton herself was not a bit altered, I thought, and I informed her of the fact, at which she seemed quite unaccountably pleased.

"I shall have time to tell you a little about the people here," she observed, "so that you may not feel hopelessly at sea among them. To begin with, then, there are the Downhams. She goes in for dress and very young men. She won't take any notice of you; in fact, she very seldom talks at all, except tête-à-tête, and then only to one of her pet boys. Sir John you must beware of; he ought to be labelled dangerous."

"Why?" I asked, in some trepidation. "What does he do?"

"Well, he is a hardened middle-aged flirt; the worst sort, as perhaps you don't know. He is sure to be very nice to you; you are just the kind of girl he likes. But don't let yourself be beguiled by him. Then I have been lucky in getting the beautiful Mrs. Wyncott. You know she was the belle of last season. She has no mind, only manners, but as long as her looks last she will be a celebrity. Her brother, young Alan Beauchamp, is here too. He is first favourite with Lady Downham just now."

"And where is Mr. Wyncott?" I asked.

"Oh, he is shooting big game in Africa; he generally is. Well, then there's Lord Regie Gayford. He is an artist, and has a wonderful talent for painting horses. I have given him a commission for a portrait of my mare Delicia. Lastly we have Sereno, the new society tenor. You mustn't mind anything he says or does; he has been frightfully spoilt, and poses as a character."

"Is he an Italian?" I asked.

"Oh, no, chiefly Irish, I fancy," she answered carelessly. "But he speaks with a foreign accent when he doesn't forget. You see nowadays one must have somebody of that sort who doesn't mind playing the fool, or we should bore one another to death. And now, my dear child," she continued in more serious tones, "I must confess that at present I have absolutely no one for you. I asked two or three unattached men, but they were none of them able to come, except Mr. Colthurst, who arrives to-morrow, but unfortunately

he never speaks to a girl if he can help it."

"Oh, please don't think about me, Cousin Cara," I said. "Everything will be so new and strange to me that there is no fear of my being dull."

"Then you will be very unlike most of my guests," said Cara, laughing. "Now I will leave you to dress. Don't put on your best frock; we have only our parson, Mr. Johnson, coming to-night, and if we all appeared in our night-gowns he would be none the wiser. He would only admire the unaffected simplicity of our attire."

I was left alone for the next half-hour, my mind in a whirl with the new and varied information I had just received. I felt already as though I were separated by an immeasurable distance from my old life, with its commonplace interests and childish pleasures. At length Simpson appeared with a spray of flowers and the announcement that she had come to do my hair. From what I had heard and read of fashionable ladies'-maids, I had feared that she might prove sour and disdainful, especially when she perceived the very limited extent of my wardrobe. But I was agreeably surprised to find her a person of amiable and condescending manners, who seemed to take an artistic interest in myself as a new and promising subject for the exercise of her talents. She was pleased to express her approval of my hair, and preserved a discreet silence on the subject of my country-made black grenadine.

When my toilet was complete, I had some difficulty in recognising myself in the tall, slender girl, with bare neck and arms, and elaborately-dressed hair, whose eyes, half pleased, half scared, looked back at me out of the long mirror. Scarcely had I made acquaintance with this strange new self than Cara made her appearance, radiant in a tea-gown of many-hued brocade.

"Bless the child, how nice she looks now she's dressed!" was her first exclamation. "If you could sell the secret of your complexion, my dear, you would make your fortune in a week. I half doubt whether——" she paused, and then went on—"I shan't be able to look after you as much as I ought, perhaps, and a country house is not exactly like a girls' school. However, keep a cool head and a cold heart, and don't believe a word anybody says to you, and you'll get on all right."

When we entered the drawing-room we

found it occupied only by Mr. Broughton and a bald, spectacled gentleman, whom I rightly guessed to be the Rector. Cousin Joe was stout and elderly, with an expression of the most beaming good-humour on his chubby face.

"So this is Miss Theodora, is it?" he exclaimed, shaking me warmly by the hand. "Glad to see you, my dear, glad to see you."

I thought him very kind and pleasant at the time, an opinion I was compelled to change when closer acquaintance had shown me that his "bonhomie" was chiefly manner, and that his predominant characteristic was an overweening spirit of contradiction.

Mrs. Wynescott was the next to make her appearance, an angelic apparition in ivory velvet and silver. She was followed by her brother, Mr. Beauchamp, a smooth-faced, close-cropped youth, with but a faint reflection of his sister's good looks, and by Lord Regie Gayford. I looked up with some interest when the Downhams came in. After the character I had just heard of Sir John, it was natural I should regard him with mingled feelings of curiosity and trepidation. He proved to be a tall, distinguished-looking man, with fine melancholy eyes, and rather an ill-tempered mouth under his long moustache. The tenor, M. Sereno, was the last to make his appearance. There was certainly nothing about his outward man that denoted his profession of society singer. He was a stout, pale young man, with light hair and eyes, and a heavy, clean-shaven face. His prevailing expression seemed to be one of abnormal gravity.

"Oh, yes, I know I am very wicked to be so late," he began, addressing the company generally in a high-pitched, plaintive voice, and with a manner of childish confidence. "But my hand was so shaky this evening, I could not tie my neck-tie. I caught a wandering housemaid and tried to persuade her to do it for me, but she seemed to think it wasn't her place, or wasn't quite proper; I did not clearly understand which. So if I don't look quite as nice as usual to-night, it really is not my fault."

"Never mind," said Cara consolingly. "We won't look at you more than we can help. Ah, there is dinner at last."

Rather to my relief, the Rector was told off to take me in to dinner. The only male beings with whom I had hitherto been brought much in contact were the

clergy. I had played violent games in the company of young curates at school-feasts, and elderly Rectors had condescended to crack small jokes for my benefit at parish tea-parties. Consequently, I stood in no awe of the cloth. With a strong feeling of thankfulness that no more alarming partner had fallen to my lot, I took Mr. Johnson's respectable, unexciting arm, and went in to my first dinner-party.

A first dinner-party! To the débutante, fresh from the school-room and its miscellaneous tea, her first dinner-party is no mere entertainment—it is a solemn function to which she looks forward with awe and anxiety rather than with any expectation of pleasure. The array of wine-glasses, to say nothing of spoons and forks, that flanks her plate is enough in itself to quench all frivolous tendencies. If she use one of those forks or spoons for a wrong purpose, she will feel that she has disgraced herself for ever in the eyes of the imposing beings who minister to her wants.

The food itself, though the cook may be a "cordon bleu," affords no gratification to her uneducated palate. Oysters, truffles, and caviare, not one of these so-called delicacies can compare for a moment, in her estimation, with muffins, pound-cake, or strawberry jam. Worst of all, there is the conversation in which she is expected to take her part. A strange man sits on either side of her, with whom, in all probability, she has not an idea in common. Ideas of any kind are a scarce commodity in her undeveloped brain; how should it be otherwise, considering that her reading has been strictly limited to school-room literature, and that her knowledge of the world is nil? It is the fashion to decry the conversational powers of the "young person," but it must be owned that she labours under many and obvious disadvantages.

My first dinner-party proved no exception to the rule I have here laid down; it certainly was far from being a success from the point of view of an entertainment. I was nervous, I was not hungry, thanks perhaps to the excellent tea I had consumed, and I was not amused. Mr. Beauchamp sat on my right, but Lady Downham, who was on his other side, monopolised most of his attention.

My clerical neighbour was the first to open the conversation.

"Are you fond of botany?" he enquired, turning his mild spectacled eyes upon me.

"N-no," I replied absently, wondering why some people put their bread on the right side, and some on the left. "At least, I'm very fond of flowers, but I know nothing about them. I never can remember their long names."

"The flora of Norfolk is particularly interesting," he continued. "I have made a large collection of marsh plants."

"Oh, really," I returned, trying to look impressed, while I was inwardly debating whether it would look very "young" to refuse sherry with my soup, and whether if the wine were once poured out it would be rude to leave it.

Mr. Johnson, feeling, no doubt, that he had done his duty by me for the time being, devoted himself to his dinner, and silence reigned between us for the whole of the soup period. As I grew more at my ease amid my strange surroundings, I awoke to the consciousness that, so far, I had been anything but a social success. With the arrival of the fish I bethought me that I had heard that every man liked talking "shop," and clerical "shop" I flattered myself I thoroughly understood. Accordingly, I put a few leading questions about the parish, which speedily brought down an avalanche of information on my head. The Rector, it appeared, was burdened with two churches, which, he said, was quite as bad as having twins, since it was necessary to provide "double of everything" for them. He also claimed my sympathy in his difficulty with his churchwarden, who had become a Wesleyan Methodist, but who obstinately refused to resign his office. To all this I lent an attentive ear, and was really quite sorry when the signal was given for leaving the dining-room, before the churchwarden incident came to an end.

When we reached the drawing-room, Lady Downham subsided into an easy-chair, and the profound silence that seemed always to distinguish her when in feminine society, while Mrs. Wyncott, who had such pretty manners that one instinctively felt the "twopence extra" had not been grudged in her schooling, said sweetly:

"Now let us three have a nice talk."

This arrangement ended in a discussion between her and Cara of topics of which I knew nothing, and people of whom I had never heard.

As soon as the men came in, Sir John, whom Cara had introduced to me before dinner, made his way round the room to

the corner whither I had retreated, and sank into a chair at my side. After the character I had heard of him I felt just a little nervous, but he did not look very alarming as, fixing his fine eyes upon me, he asked :

"Do you ride, Miss Western ?"

"No," I replied. "At least, I can only ride a donkey."

"Oh, but I call that very clever," he said, smiling. "I remember when I used to try and ride a donkey, I invariably fell off."

"I should like to learn to ride immensely," I remarked. "I am very fond of horses, though I know nothing whatever about them."

"Your cousin is a first-rate horse-woman," he observed, "and always has some good animals in her stable. I know there is a smart-looking cob there; you might have some riding lessons while you are here. I shall be happy to offer myself for the post of instructor. I have a perfect temper, thoroughly understand my business, and want no pay."

"That sounds satisfactory," I returned. "I suppose you can have a good character from your last place."

"You want to know too much," he said, laughing. "Oh, there's that—there's Sereno on the music-stool. I suppose we shall be expected to hold our tongues for the next half-hour."

He made a wry face and relapsed into silence.

M. Sereno, accompanying himself, sang very softly two or three little songs in an unknown language, which I heard afterwards was Norwegian. He had a pretty voice, and his delivery would have been sympathetic, had not its over-simplicity bordered on affectation. By the time the songs came to an end Sir John had disappeared, and the Rector occupied the

vacant chair at my side. The story of the Dissenting Churchwarden was resumed, and with a few excursions into other departments of parochial politics, lasted until the clerical guest took his departure.

Scarcely had the door closed behind him than Sereno, shaking himself like a dog that has just come out of the water, exclaimed :

"Now to prepare the decks for action. Somebody pull out the card-table, and somebody else find the counters. Broughton, can you break me up a fiver ?"

"I think we had better adjourn to the smoking-room," said Cara. "I know you will all be cross and miserable till you get your cigarettes." Theo," she continued, "it is time young people were in bed. I will take you up to your room."

She put her arm through mine and marched me off.

"I'm afraid you've had a dull evening, child," she said kindly. "But you were very good to take charge of the Rector all the evening. He generally comes upon Joey or me, because no one else will be bored with him."

"Oh, but I was quite happy, and very much amused," I assured her.

"Well, don't get up earlier than you like," she went on. "Breakfast is nominally at ten, but no one is ever down, except Joey. Your tea will be brought you at half-past eight, so you won't starve if you are accustomed to very early hours."

Of all the new ideas I had imbibed in the course of the last few hours, the one that startled me most was the fact that any family could habitually breakfast at ten o'clock without bringing down fire from heaven upon their heads. So closely is early rising connected with virtue in the minds of the very young.

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